

# a supermarket horror story

by M. F. Sullivan

stoned,  
i made the mistake  
of walking to the store across the busy street  
to find myself in the middle  
of the pep-up  
for a basketball game  
or something like that.

i have never liked sports  
and liked people less,  
and people in stores less than that,  
so i avoided eye contact with everyone wearing a jersey,

let's make it out without incident.  
four things to get,  
pomade, toilet paper, steak, and butter.

the pomade took three minutes of searching  
and one of deliberation.

tub in-hand,  
i made for the wall of toilet paper  
at the only quiet end of the store  
where i could almost breathe  
until in the corner of my vision  
appeared a horror-movie red blur.

i turned,  
and found a cardinal,

six feet tall,  
black mouth gaping,  
wearing a red jersey.

i have always liked mascots  
less than any aforementioned.

it spread its arms,  
nodded,  
hugged me from the side.

weakly, i laughed  
then said,  
'no,'  
and,  
'no, not at all. that's okay.'

it nodded again,  
flashing a thumbs-up,  
and moved down an aisle.

i never saw it disappear around the corner,  
and later,  
after finding the steaks and butter,  
as i emerged to the parking lot  
shimmering with arizona heat,  
there it was in the distance.

it was coming  
right  
for  
me.

i made a sharp left  
and walked home

weary of birds  
singing in the treetops.

